

PRELIMINARY SUMMARY OF INFORMATION

SUBMITTED TO THE COMMISSION ON CHICAGO LANDMARKS IN DECEMBER 2009

UNION PARK HOTEL (FORMERLY THE VICEROY HOTEL) 1519-1521 W. WARREN BOULEVARD

BUILT: 1929-30

ARCHITECT: BENJAMIN ALBERT COMM

The Union Park Hotel is a significant example of a Chicago residential hotel building due to its distinctive Art Deco architectural style, unusually colorful and finely detailed terra-cotta facade, and its prominent location on Warren Boulevard opposite historic Union Park. Constructed of polychromatic glazed terra cotta and yellow and golden-brown brick, this residential hotel building (more recently known as the Viceroy Hotel) was conceived as a “modernistic” building, adopting the then-popular style of the fast-paced, “Jazz Age” society. It was completed in 1930 and designed by Chicago architect Benjamin Albert Comm.

Terra cotta glazes in pastel hues accentuate the Union Park Hotel’s sophisticated French-influenced Art Deco-style decoration, including bands of geometric motifs, sunbursts, angular zigzags, and stylized floral panels. Despite the relatively small-scale of the building, its vivid design and distinctive colors enhance its visual presence on the south side of Union Park.

The building’s terra-cotta façade reflects the appeal of colored terra cotta in the late 1920s as advances in terra-cotta manufacturing made possible a vast array of details and colors for building design. Chicago was an important national center of terra-cotta manufacturing, and the building reflects the popularity of this building material with Chicago builders and architects and the significance of the terra-cotta industry to Chicago.

The Union Park Hotel is located on a triangular city block bounded by Ashland Avenue to the west, Warren Boulevard to the north, and the diagonal Ogden Avenue to the southeast. Immediately north of the building is Union Park. In addition to being an amenity for the hotel's guest and residents, the park setting enhances the visibility of the Union Park Hotel from the surrounding blocks.

The front façade (north elevation) of the building is built up to the sidewalk and extends approximately 80 feet along Warren Blvd., and the east and west side elevations measure 115 feet deep to a rear alley. The building's basic H-shaped plan is created by light wells centered on the building's side elevations. The six-story-tall structure consists of load-bearing masonry walls, steel columns, and clay-tile partitions intended to reduce the risk of fire. The front (north) façade, facing Warren Blvd. and Union Park, is highly decorative while the relatively plain side (east and west) and alley (south) elevations are constructed of Chicago common brick.

The six-story hotel's front elevation is eight bays wide and is characterized by strong symmetry. Clad with highly-stylized terra-cotta decoration in a palette of creamy beige, brown, golden, and pastel hues, the Union Park Hotel's front façade utilizes a basic three-part division with a prominent single-story base anchoring a uniformly expressed shaft that rises to a lively roofline. Beginning with its dark-toned band of brown terra cotta situated at the ground level, its sandy beige-colored first story, and its bright cream-colored piers that rise to the parapet, the building's terra cotta ornament is shaded into lighter and lighter tonalities as it rises toward the top.

The building's base is clad in dark brown terra cotta that is slightly darker than the rest of the building, giving it a weightier appearance. Large street-level storefront windows are framed with decorative-metal frames with ornamental cresting, and the central entrance door is located within a segmented-arch opening that recalls the corbelled-arches of Mayan architecture, a motif often borrowed by the Art Deco style of architecture. A decorative terra-cotta string course marks the division between the first floor and the upper stories and features a chevron pattern with superimposed green, white, pink, and yellow geometric motifs.

Above the street level, the design takes on a strong vertical emphasis dominated by continuous piers of golden-yellow face brick set off by white terra-cotta bands that extend the full height of the building. At the central bay the brick piers are replaced by three fluted piers in white terra cotta. Spandrel panels are recessed and faced with beige face brick set in a "stack bond," where the mortar joints between bricks are aligned both vertically and horizontally. Ornamental terra-cotta medallions with geometric floral motifs in green, white and yellow occupy the center of each spandrel. Punched window openings are framed with chevron-decorated lintels and projecting sills in terra-cotta.

The uninterrupted piers draw the eye upward to the building's decorated rooftop parapet. The sixth-floor window heads are topped with segmented terra-cotta arches that mimic the unusual ground-floor entrance door opening. Within these arches there is an abstract "sunburst," a favorite motif of Art Deco design, made up of geometric shapes and floral forms in white, green and beige terra cotta. In between these sunbursts, brick piers terminate in abstracted wheat

WORK UNDER WAY ON SIX STORY INN NEAR UNION PARK

Of Modernistic Design;
Cost \$500,000.

The old district about Union Park—an attractive breathing spot not far west of the loop on Washington boulevard—comes in for a \$500,000 hotel development in a six story hostelry which is now being erected at 1519-25 Warren avenue by the Union Park Hotel Building corporation. This hotel will be opposite the park, between Ashland boulevard and Ogden avenue.

In contrast to the majority of the structures in the locality, which are representative of the older styles of the city's architecture, the new hotel will be of modernistic design. And it will add a dash of color to a district which has been well daubed with grime put on by Old Father Time for the front elevation is to be finished in terra cotta of varied hues. Side walls



Top: The Union Park Hotel is a significant example of a Chicago residential hotel building due to its distinctive Art Deco style and unusually colorful and finely detailed terra-cotta facade. Left: A Chicago Tribune article from 1929 announcing plans for the hotel touted its innovative "modernistic" design. Bottom: Historic Union Park is located immediately north of the Union Park Hotel. When the Hotel opened, Union Park was one of the first racially-integrated parks in Chicago.



shafts in white and green terra cotta. The spaces between the piers combine a lively field of basket-weave bond brick and vertical bands of terra cotta with wave-like *sine* curves that connote electricity and radiation. The parapet terminates in a false gable at its central bay and a stepped line between piers.

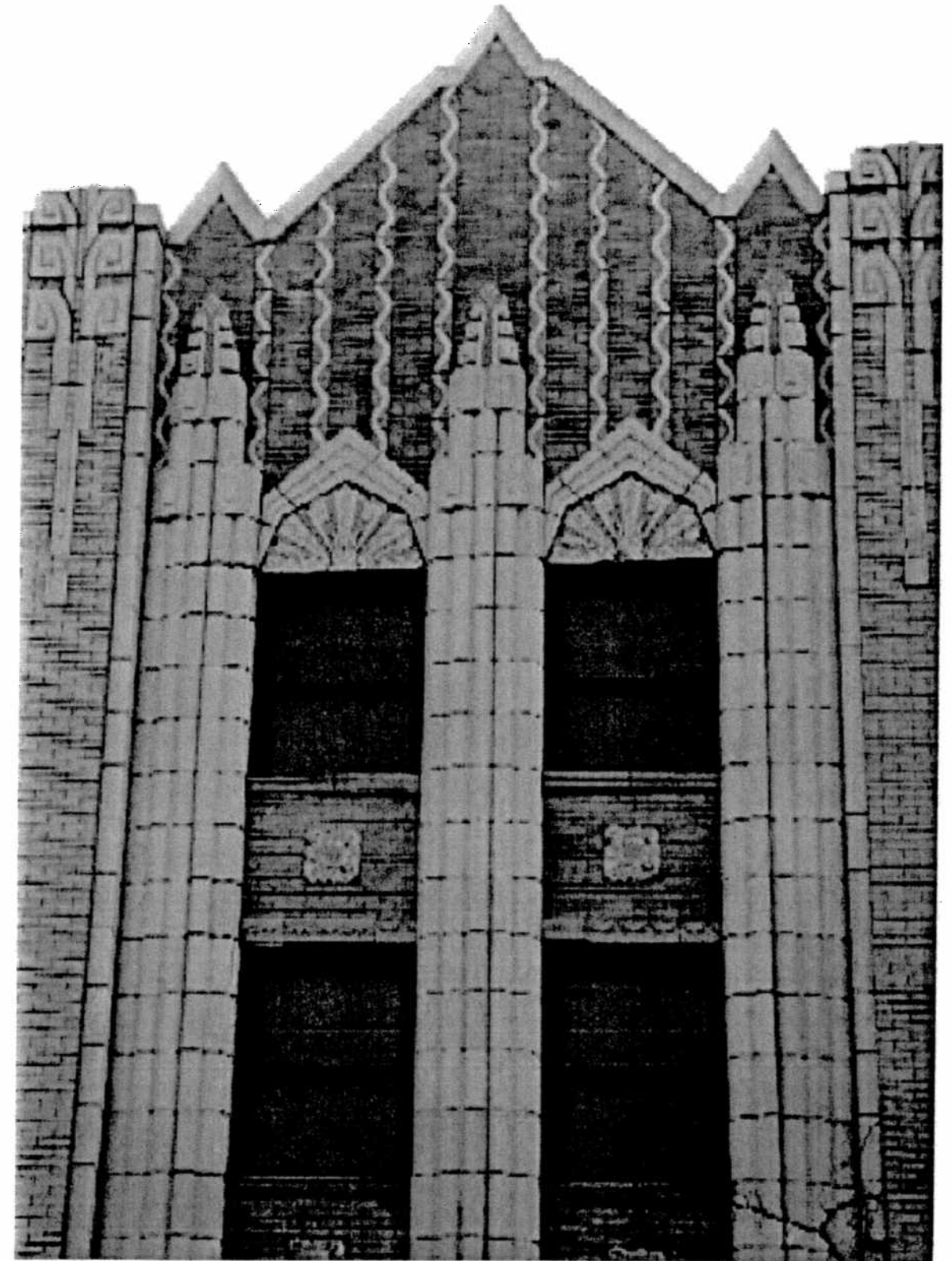
The interior of the Union Park Hotel was designed to include 175 rooms with private baths. The ground story includes a modest lobby with an entrance from the street. A small vestibule leads to the lobby; the ground story also includes seven guest rooms and a larger manager's apartment. Floors two through six each have guest rooms arranged along a double-loaded corridor. At an average of 150 square feet, guest rooms are compact, and most were originally furnished with space-saving Murphy Beds.

The building was renamed the Viceroy Hotel in 1963. At that time, the existing projecting canopy over the building's main entrance and a slender neon sign (recently removed) were installed. Currently vacant, the building was acquired by the City and is slated for rehabilitation and reuse as affordable housing.

THE ART DECO ARCHITECTURAL STYLE

The Union Park Hotel is a fine example of Art Deco-style architecture, one of the first broad movements in American architecture that sought to break from traditional historical revivals. The style takes its name the 1925 *Exposition Internationale des Arts Decoratifs et Industriels Modernes* in Paris where jewelry, clothing, furniture, and architecture displayed a future-looking aesthetic based on new materials and methods of manufacture. The influence of contemporary movements in the fine arts such as Cubism and Futurism was also evident at the *Exposition*. Unlike later iterations of modernist architecture, the Art Deco lacked a strong theoretical foundation but was intended to be a form of decoration that would be eye catching, popular with the public, and readily applied to a range of commercial building types. Over time the Art Deco aesthetic has become associated with the fast pace and elegance of the American "Jazz Age" or "Roaring Twenties."

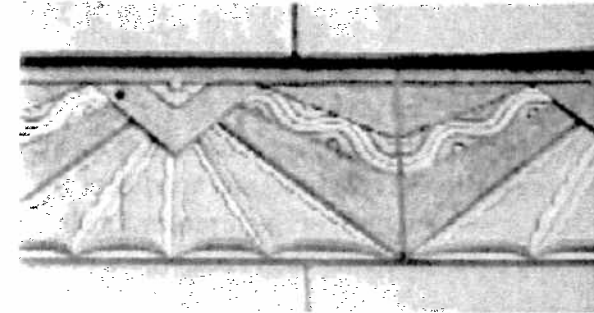
The Union Park Hotel's relatively flat façade and hard corners reflects the Art Deco's emphasis on pure geometric forms. The combination of the continuous vertical piers with the understated spandrel panels lends the building a strong vertical emphasis, another important trait of the style. The terra-cotta ornament on the Union Park Hotel provides a vivid pastel color palette that is unusual in the context of Art Deco-style architecture in Chicago. Geometric patterns in terra cotta such as the chevrons in the band above the first story, the "sunbursts" above the top story windows, and the wave-like curves in the parapet ornaments are all typical motifs of the style. The abstracted plant forms that are also common in Art Deco architecture are seen in the stylized wheat shafts at the parapet and the floral medallions in the spandrel panels. The Mayan-influenced entrance door-opening also manifests the Art Deco style's incorporation of Pre-Columbian and other archaeological architectural forms.



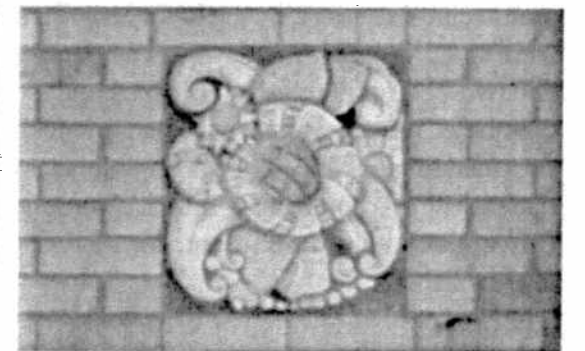
Above: The Union Park Hotel's relatively flat facade and hard corners reflect the Art Deco style's emphasis on pure geometric forms. Geometric patterns in terra cotta such as the wave-like curves at the building's parapet are typical motifs of the Art Deco style.



Above: The combination of the continuous vertical piers with the understated spandrel panels lends the Union Park Hotel a strong vertical emphasis, another important trait of the Art Deco style.



Additional details of the Union Park Hotel's terra-cotta ornament.



THE UNION PARK HOTEL AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF APARTMENT HOTELS IN CHICAGO

The Union Park Hotel is an example of a residential or apartment hotel, a specific building type built in Chicago between 1918 and 1930. Combining aspects of both hotel and apartment living, this new type of residential building housed the growing number of single professionals, office workers, and young couples working in the city's boom years of the 1920s.

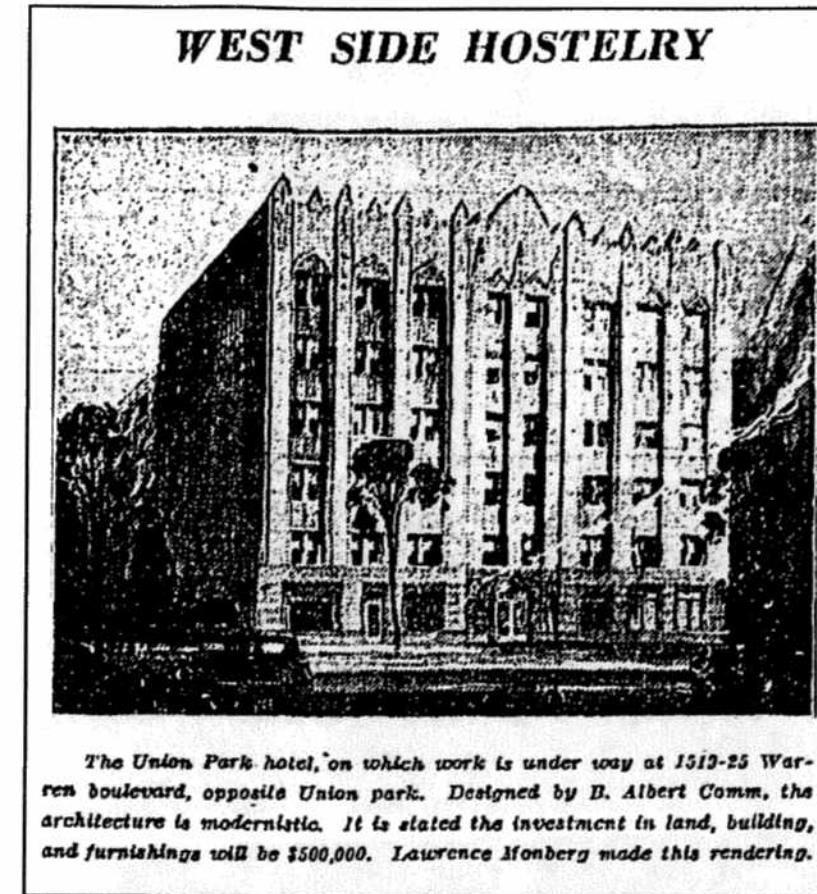
Residential hotels, also known as apartment hotels, developed in Chicago in the early twentieth century as a response to changing demographics and financial abilities among middle- and upper-middle-class Chicagoans. Earlier in the City's history, cheaper land values and low servant wages allowed a broad range of households, from the most wealthy to the middle class, to afford individual houses staffed with at least one servant. The growing expense of both in the years immediately prior to World War I, however, encouraged many Chicagoans, initially loath to consider apartment living due to its social non-respectability, to reconsider.

Chicago hotels had always served a variety of patrons, from short-term visitors to the City to long-term residents, but apartment hotels as a specific building type combined aspects of both hotels and apartments. Usually larger in scale than Chicago's typical small 3-story apartment buildings, apartment hotels were often visually ornate with ornament based on historic architectural styles or, by the late 1920s, on innovative styles such as Art Deco. Apartments were small, ranging from studios in more modest buildings such as the Union Park Hotel to one- and two-bedroom suites in more prestigious lakefront buildings that could be expanded or contracted based on residents' needs. Kitchenettes (often called "pantries") were often provided for cooking, but in larger hotels room service was available, and residents typically had the use of a hotel dining room. Ballrooms and meeting rooms, typical of tourist and convention hotels, were absent. A variety of personal services, including maid service, were also available.

Residential hotels provided small apartments with a level of amenities that appealed to single professionals, office workers, and childless couples, for whom the expense of maintaining a house was beyond their means. Typically built in better, more-fashionable neighborhoods, residential hotels satisfied a niche clientele in the City's housing market during the prosperous years of the 1920s.

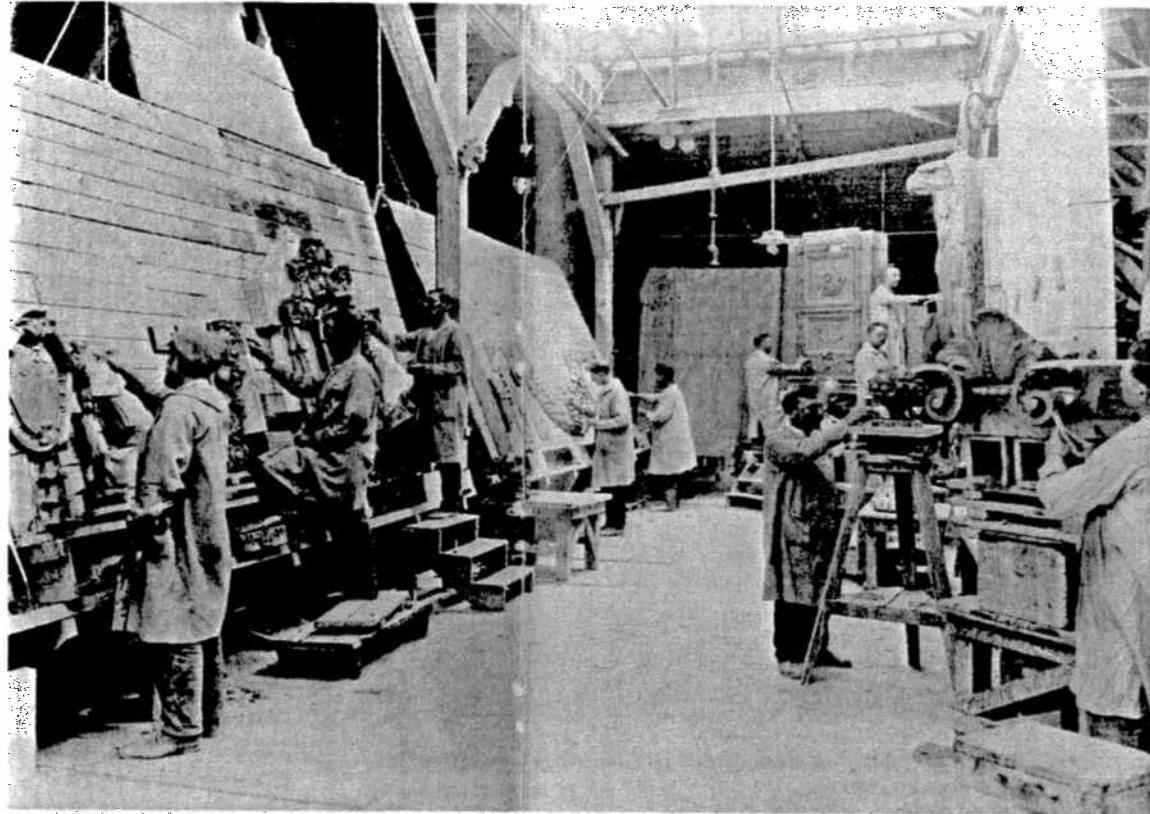
In a National Register of Historic Places nomination on "Chicago's High-Rise Apartment Hotels," architectural historian Daniel Bluestone notes:

Rather than aiming to simply fit their buildings into older neighborhoods, the apartment hotel architects of the 1920s designed compelling monuments to modern living. The buildings assumed the status of spectacles to new urban arrangements. Efficient, technologically sophisticated, and socially convenient, the buildings, with their accommodation of transience, reflected something of the bustle and social mobility of the 1920s.



Combining aspects of both hotel and apartment living, residential or apartment hotels, like the Union Park Hotel were primarily built in Chicago between 1918 and 1930. Left: A rendering of the Hotel from a 1929 announcement. Bottom: A 1930s advertisement promoting the Hotel.





The announcement for the Union Park Hotel promised that “the interior of the building will be treated in the modernistic mode” and many of the rooms “will have beds that fold into the wall, enabling them [the entire apartment] to be furnished as living rooms.” Unlike the boarding houses and tenements of previous decades, residential hotels provided small apartments with a level of amenities that appealed to a growing middle class.

In addition to this compact efficiency, apartment hotels were typically located with convenient access to public transportation and in areas that had been regarded as fashionable, upper class residential districts. The proximity of Union Park, the Ashland Avenue station of the Lake Street elevated train (now the CTA Green Line), and the neighborhood’s historic reputation as the “Gold Coast” of the Near West Side are all consistent with the setting of other apartment hotels in Chicago.

THE UNION PARK HOTEL AND ARCHITECTURAL TERRA COTTA IN CHICAGO

The finely-crafted terra cotta façade of the Union Park Hotel exemplifies the importance of the terra-cotta industry to Chicago in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. In the context of small-scale commercial architecture in Chicago, it is a visually exuberant and unusual example of the Art Deco style, with its pastel colors and abstracted foliate and geometric ornament influenced by contemporary French design.

Concerning the symbiosis of building type and building material, architectural historian Daniel Bluestone wrote:

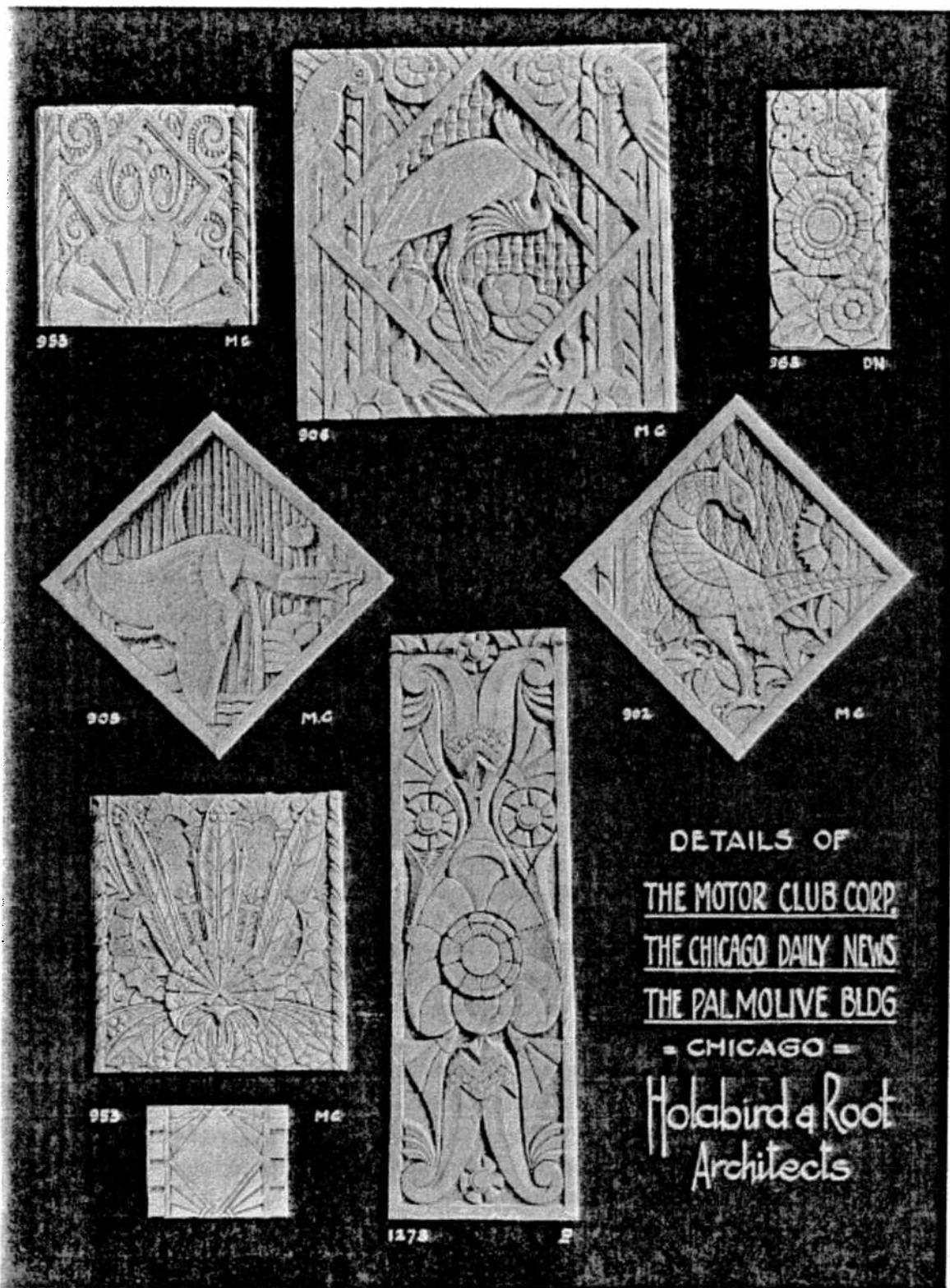
Apartment hotels in Chicago, including the Union Park Hotel, were often embellished with terra-cotta ornament. Terra cotta promoted the development of a highly variegated polychromatic palette for apartment hotel exteriors—an approach to exterior design that made the buildings loom large both on the street and on the horizon. . . . Many apartment hotel designs by-passed the modest exteriors of earlier apartment buildings in favor of modern facades studded with terra cotta ornament and details.

From the immediate post-Fire years of the 1870s through the early 1930s, Chicago was a leading American center for architectural terra-cotta design and manufacture. Terra cotta factories took advantage of Chicago’s vibrant and innovative architectural community, its strategic location at the center of the nation’s great railroad transportation network, and its proximity to clay deposits in nearby Indiana.

In Italian, terra cotta means “baked earth.” For architectural purposes, however, terra cotta generally refers to building cladding or ornament manufactured from clay hand molded or cast into hollow blocks with internal stiffening webs and fired at temperatures higher than used for brick. Developed first to produce clay urns and garden statuary, the Chicago Terra Cotta Company—the first terra cotta company in the United States—opened in 1868 and soon expanded into architectural terra cotta production. Terra cotta soon became a staple of



Chicago terra-cotta manufacturers embraced avant-garde Art Deco-style ornamentation in the late 1920s. Top: Northwestern Terra Cotta Company modelers at work. Bottom: The Laramie State Bank Building (a designated Chicago Landmark at 5200 W. Chicago Ave.) is a fine example of polychromatic terra cotta, popular in the late 1920s.



architects seeking fireproofing and decorative features in the years after the great Chicago Fire of 1871.

After the Fire, when it became apparent that cast-iron structural members in destroyed buildings had melted in the extreme heat, and brick and granite had broken and crumbled, terra cotta came into its own as a protective, fireproof building material. Terra cotta was used to encase cast iron structural supports such as I-beams and columns, as well as floor joists, partitions and as backing for exterior walls. Terra-cotta cornices were also in high demand because of their relative lightness (in comparison with stone) and perceived durability.

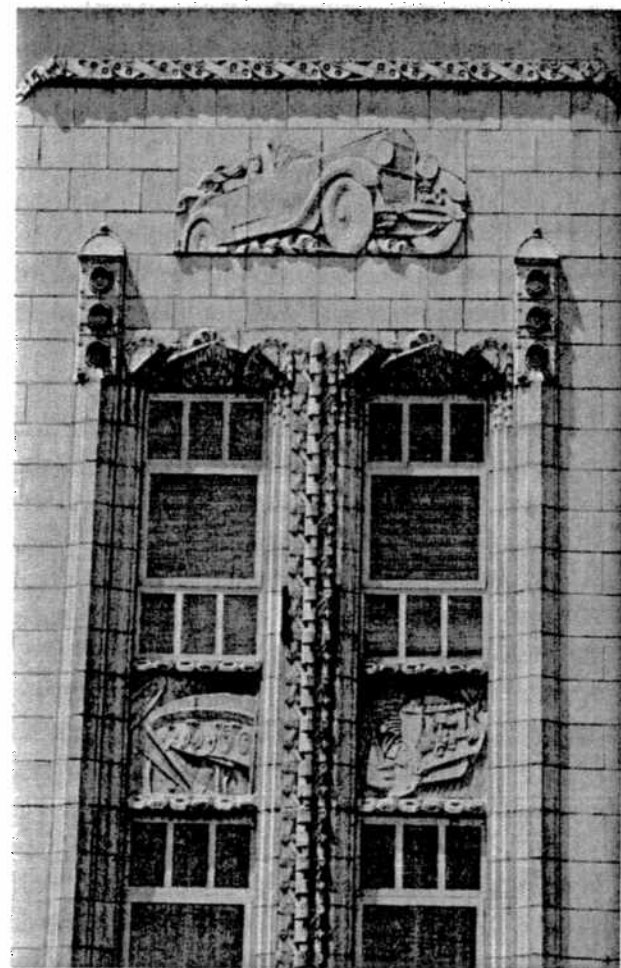
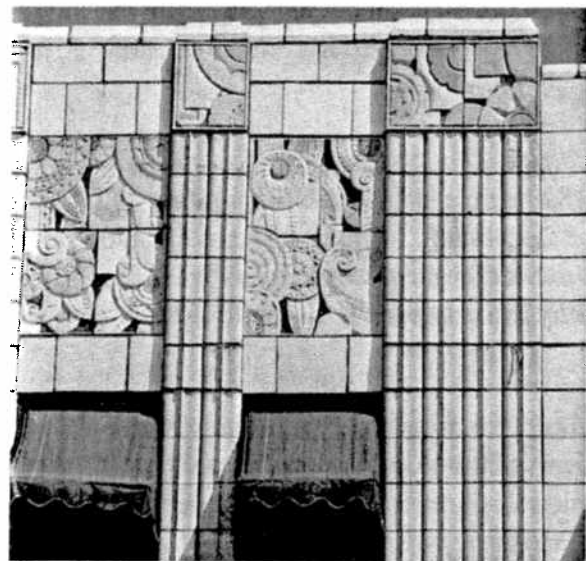
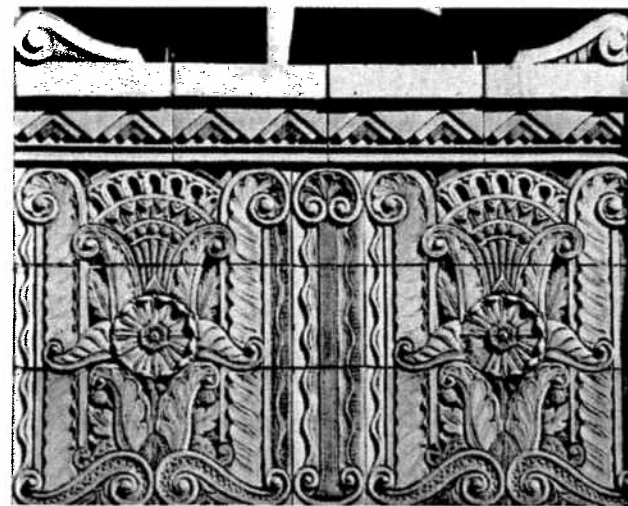
Use of terra cotta expanded when Chicago passed an ordinance in 1886 requiring that all buildings over ninety feet in height should be absolutely fireproof. Builders of skyscrapers found terra cotta an attractive medium because of its lightness, durability (crisp details did not erode over time and could easily be cleaned), and potential for decorative uses (terra cotta's plastic quality allowed for highly original ornament)—all attributes which stemmed from the nature of the material. By 1900 three important terra-cotta companies—Northwestern, American, and Midland—were headquartered in Chicago.

In these early years, however, few architects took advantage of the opportunities for colored glazes being pioneered by terra cotta firms. Even an 1898 article from *The Brickbuilder*, entitled "Notes on Terra Cotta for Exterior Polychrome Decoration," stated: "it seems to have been a question of willingness on the part of architects rather than the public that has thus deterred the use of color." Terra cotta was viewed mainly as a cheaper alternative to stone, which it often imitated in color.

The plasticity and endless color possibilities of ornamental terra cotta made it especially useful for the Art Deco style of architecture. In 1927 the officers of the Northwestern Terra Cotta Company brought over six French sculptors to supply new designs for their firm. These artists introduced up-to-date Art Deco-style building ornament to the repertoire of historic architectural styles already produced by the firm, and Northwestern became known for its "Modern French" terra cotta ornament. The modelers, using motifs inspired by the large 1925 fair catalogue they had brought with them from Paris, quickly convinced local architects and other terra-cotta companies of the merits of the new Art Deco style. Soon colorful stylized flowers, dancing zig-zags, plump birds and exotic maidens began to make their debut in Chicago architecture. Unlike the prevailing historically inspired styles, these motifs represented an architectural style that looked to the future.

As interpreted in terra cotta by Northwestern sculptors, nature was reduced to its basic geometric forms. In the Art Deco style, flowers and leaves became flattened circles and triangles, while the lines and patterns within these became evenly spaced rays or chevrons. Other favorite Art Deco forms were volutes, arches, rays, bubbles, symmetrical ripples and fountains, and the stepped form known as the ziggurat. This kind of ornament was particularly suitable for multi-colored terra cotta, for the interplay of colors helped to emphasize the dramatic forms and lines of the design while making the low-relief ornament more distinct.

The Union Park Hotel may have been influenced by the Art Deco-style terra-cotta ornament being designed by the Northwestern Terra Cotta Company (samples of which are illustrated above).



Other examples of polychromatic terra-cotta buildings from the 1920s found throughout the United States, including (top) Bickford's Restaurant building in New York; (above) the building at 3027-29 Troost Ave., Kansas City, Missouri; and (right) the former Hyde Park Chevrolet Showroom, Chicago.

The Union Park Hotel's terra-cotta ornament is handsomely ornamented with an array of pastel colors and Art Deco-style details such as chevrons and abstracted floral motifs. Although building research has not attributed the design of the building's terra-cotta to a particular company, its polychromy and decorative ornament appears to be influenced by the Northwestern Terra Cotta Company's French-trained designers, if not designed by them.

Terra cotta-fronted buildings were especially popular during the 1920s and early 1930s as the styles, colors, and details possible with terra cotta multiplied. Most were ornamented with historical styles such as Classical Revival, Gothic Revival, and Spanish Baroque Revival. Terra-cotta storefront compositions based on the non-historic foliate ornament of Louis Sullivan also survive throughout the City.

Terra cotta used for Classical Revival- or Sullivanesque-style buildings were usually designed to imitate stone with white or gray terra cotta. In contrast, Art Deco-style buildings sometimes have more exotic colors used for terra cotta. However, Chicago architects in general were relatively restrained in their exploitation of colored terra cotta, choosing to limit colors on any given building to two or three. The Union Park Hotel's combination of Art-Deco style and terra cotta ornament in a variety of pastel shades is unusual in the context of residential apartment buildings in Chicago.

CRITERIA FOR DESIGNATION

According to the Municipal Code of Chicago (Sect 2-120-620 and -630), the Commission on Chicago Landmarks has the authority to make a preliminary recommendation of landmark designation for a building, structure, object or district if the Commission determines it meets two or more of the stated "criteria for designation," as well as possesses a significant degree of its historic design integrity.

The following should be considered by the Commission on Chicago Landmarks in determining whether to recommend that the Union Park Hotel be designated as a Chicago Landmark.

Criterion 1: Critical Part of the City's History

Its value as an example of the architectural, cultural, economic, historic, social, or other aspect of the heritage of the City of Chicago, State of Illinois, or the United States.

- The Union Park Hotel, with its exceptional, unusually colored and well-crafted terra-cotta façade, exemplifies the importance of the terra-cotta industry in the history of Chicago and Chicago's premier role in the production of this important building material.
- The Union Park Hotel reflects the importance of residential apartment buildings to the development of Chicago in the early twentieth century.

Criterion 4: Important Architecture

Its exemplification of an architectural type or style distinguished by innovation, rarity, uniqueness, or overall quality of design, detail, materials or craftsmanship.

- The Union Park Hotel is a significant example of Art Deco-style terra-cotta design as used for a small-scale Chicago residential apartment hotel building.
- The Union Park Hotel's use of pastel-colored terra cotta ornament in a variety of colors and distinctive French influenced Art Deco design is innovative and unusual in the context of Chicago architecture.
- The Union Park Hotel is distinguished by the excellent quality, details and craftsmanship of its Art Deco-style ornament, including zigzags, stylized floral panels, scallops and fluted piers.

Integrity Criteria

The integrity of the proposed landmark must be preserved in light of its location, design, setting, materials, workmanship and ability to express its historic community, architectural or aesthetic interest or value.

The Union Park Hotel has excellent integrity. The building's main façade facing Warren Boulevard retains the vast majority of its original features, including its Art Deco-style front façade with a plethora of terra-cotta ornamentation.

Changes to the building's exterior include replacement one-over-one, double-hung windows that are similar to that of the building's original windows. Other exterior changes include the replacement of the building's main entrance door and the addition of a projecting entrance canopy. These changes are relatively minor. The building retains the ability to express its historic community, architectural, and aesthetic value through its location, overall design, decorative details, historic materials, and workmanship.

SIGNIFICANT HISTORICAL AND ARCHITECTURAL FEATURES

Whenever a building, structure, object, or district is under consideration for landmark designation, the Commission on Chicago Landmarks is required to identify the "significant historical and architectural features" of the property. This is done to enable the owners and the public to understand which elements are considered the most important to preserve the historic and architectural character of the proposed landmark.

Based on its preliminary evaluation of the Union Park Hotel, the Commission staff recommends that the significant features be identified as:

- All exterior elevations, including rooflines, of the building.

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The Union Park Hotel retains excellent exterior integrity, including its handsome terra-cotta facade.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

CITY OF CHICAGO

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From *Chicago Tribune*: pp. 5 (left) and 11 (left).

From www.chicagopc.info/hotels_pz.html: pp. 5 (bottom) and 11 (bottom).

From Portfolio of Architectural Ornament v. 1: pp. 12 (top) and 14.

From Capitman, Kinerk and Wilhelm, *Rediscovering Art Deco USA*: p. 16 (top and right).

The Commission on Chicago Landmarks, whose ten members are appointed by the Mayor, was established in 1968 by city ordinance. It is responsible for recommending to the City Council that individual building, sites, objects, or entire districts be designated as Chicago Landmarks, which protects them by law. The Commission is staffed by the Chicago Department of Zoning and Land Use Planning, 33 North LaSalle Street, Room 1600, Chicago, IL 60602; (312-744-3200) phone; (312-744-2958) TTY; (312-744-9140) fax, web site: www.cityofchicago.org/landmarks

This Preliminary Summary of Information is subject to possible revision and amendment during the designation process. Only language contained within City Council's final landmark designation ordinance should be regarded as final.